**The activities below come from the following website** [**http://www.webenglishteacher.com/argument.html**](http://www.webenglishteacher.com/argument.html)

**Can’t Complain? Writing About Pet Peeves**

*By* [*DINAH MACK*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/author/dinah-mack/) *and* [*HOLLY EPSTEIN OJALVO*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/author/holly-epstein-ojalvo/)

P.C. Vey [Go to related City Room blog post »](http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/06/complaint-box-public-grooming/)

[Lesson Plans - The Learning NetworkLesson Plans - The Learning Network](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/category/lesson-plans/)

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Teaching ideas based on New York Times content.

* [See all in Language Arts »](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/category/language-arts)
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**Overview** | How can students express their complaints in articulate and constructive ways? In this lesson, students read The New York Times “Complaint Box” series and use descriptive and persuasive writing strategies to communicate their own pet peeves succinctly and productively.

**Materials** | Computers with Internet access (if available)

**Warm-up** | As students assemble, visibly and obviously act out one or more of your biggest pet peeves, like squeaking the chalk or your nails on the board; talking with a mouth full of food or chewing gum; brushing your hair, applying cosmetics or clipping your nails; or talking on your cellphone or texting.

When students express confusion, horror or surprise, write the term “pet peeve” on the board and have them identify which pet peeves you were just acting out. Ask: Why do you (students) think these behaviors bother me (the teacher)? What would the school atmosphere be like if students and teachers often did these things?

Next, ask them to brainstorm a list of eight to 10 behaviors that they find most irksome. What are their personal “pet peeves”? What makes them jump out of their skin? Whip around the room and as students share, compile a master list of the things that make your students boil. Wrap up the warm-up by having students choose one item from the list and freewrite for five minutes about why this behavior annoys them.

**Related** | In [“Complaint Box: Public Grooming,”](http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/06/complaint-box-public-grooming/) Lion Calandra gripes about the very public ways in which commuters on public transportation attend to their personal hygiene:

These days, if someone seated near me on my morning ride is putting on makeup, someone else is clipping his fingernails (and, on one odd occasion this summer, a toenail). Or they’re plucking eyebrows, tying ties, squeezing pimples, even spraying perfume. There are those who just have to bathe themselves in lotion. Others are brushing their hair. It’s the full monty, commuter style.

**Questions** | For discussion and reading comprehension:

1. What do you think about “public grooming”? Is it one of your own “pet peeves,” or do you think it is acceptable? Why?
2. What do you think the author’s tone of voice was when he said “Maybe tomorrow you can shave your legs on the train” to the woman who had just finished flossing her teeth? How can you tell?
3. What connection does the author make between public grooming and modern media, like YouTube and reality television? Do you agree or disagree?
4. Have you ever groomed yourself in public? If so, would you think twice about doing so after reading this essay?

**Related Resources**

**From The Learning Network**

* + [Lesson: Care to Comment: Considering Internet Discussion Protocol](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/10/19/care-to-comment-considering-internet-discussion-protocol/)
  + [Lesson: Responding in Kind](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/01/08/responding-in-kind/)
  + [Teaching Topics: 10 Personal Writing Ideas](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/teaching-topics/teaching-topics-10-personal-writing-ideas/)

**From NYTimes.com**

* + - [City Room: “Public Grooming Stirs Vigorous Debate”](http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/09/public-grooming-stirs-vigorous-debate/)
    - [Schott’s Vocab: “Weekend: Pet Peeves and Vocab Vexations”](http://schott.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/04/24/weekend-pet-peeves-vocab-vexations/)
    - [Diner’s Journal: “The Peeves of Others”](http://dinersjournal.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/03/18/the-peeves-of-others/)

**Around the Web**

* + - * [Read Write Think: Analyzing Grammar Pet Peeves](http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=1091)
      * [GetAnnoyed.com: The Web’s Largest List of Pet Peeves](http://www.getannoyed.com/)

**Activity** | Explain to students that they will now prepare to write their own 500-word persuasive and descriptive essays about one of their pet peeves, inspired by the [“Complaint Box” series](http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/category/complaint-box/).

Begin by having a discussion on what “worked” in Lion Calandra’s essay and what makes essays like this one interesting to read in general. You might prompt students to consider vivid description, colorful language, strong imagery, specific examples and details, dialogue, etc. They should also consider structure. Ask: How does the writer “hook” the reader from the beginning? How does the middle of the essay proceed? How does the author end the piece?

Ask students to return to the pet peeve they did the freewrite about from the warm-up (or to choose a different one) and do some more writing about it, using the following prompts:

* Write a few descriptive sentences about why this particular thing really irks you.
* Think of one to three examples of times when you observed someone engaging in this behavior. When did it happen? Where did it take place? What exactly did the person do? Describe the scene as vividly as you can.
* Have you ever addressed the person doing this thing directly? If so, what did you say, and what happened? If not, why not?
* What are some reasons why people engage in this behavior? Are they aware that it is bothersome to others?
* What factors might foster this behavior? How might people be dissuaded from engaging in this behavior?

When students are finished drafting, ask for volunteers who are willing to share their writing.

Alternatively or in addition, encourage students to share their pet peeves publicly in response to the Learning Network Student Opinion post [“What Are Your Pet Peeves?”](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/16/what-are-your-pet-peeves/). Remind students that blogs are public and their comments – if approved – will be posted in perpetuity. They should take care in writing their responses and must identify themselves by first name only. They should also pay attention to [The Learning Network’s commenting guidelines and rules](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/learning-network-commenting-faq/%20) and follow [general Web posting etiquette](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/10/19/care-to-comment-considering-internet-discussion-protocol/).)

Next, split the class into pairs or small groups, and assign each one to read another “Complaint Box” post. Suggestions: [“Immobile on the Phone”](http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/10/16/complaint-box-immobile-on-thephone/) (about people who stand still, blocking the sidewalk, while on their cell phones), [“iPod Volume”](http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/26/complaint-box-ipod-volume/) (about having to listen to others’ music because the volume on their iPod is turned up too loudly), [“I See London”](http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/09/25/complaint-box-i-see-london/) (about men wearing their pants so that their underwear is visible), [“Counter Culture”](http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/09/18/complaint-box-counter-culture/) (about rude or inattentive sales clerks) or [“No More Cheeks to Turn”](http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/08/07/complaint-box-no-more-cheeks-to-turn/) (about kids picking on a girl at camp). Or, have groups choose a post from [the entire series](http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/category/complaint-box/).

In their groups, students should fill out the sheet [Opening Up the Complaint Box](http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/blogs/learning/pdf/2009/20091116complaintbox.pdf) (PDF) as they read their chosen post.

When they are finished, have each pair or group should share their findings with the group, discussing the parts of the essay that they feel were successful and sharing their favorite parts. Afterward, ask the class: What can we learn from what works (and what doesn’t) in these essays? Make a list of writing strategies and techniques on the board.

Students should then write a full rough draft of a “Complaint Box”-style essay about their own peeve. Once they are finished, they should hold peer or student and teacher conferences and then revise the draft for a final version.

**Going further** | When all essays are complete, hold an “author’s chair” or “sharing day,” in which students have the opportunity to share their work. You might also consider compiling the essays into a literary magazine of complaints or submitting them to the school newspaper. Alternatively, create an online blog or wiki space to which students can contribute more complaint essays on an ongoing basis.

**Standards** | From [McREL](http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp), for grades 6-12:

**Writing**1-Uses the general skill and strategies of the writing process  
2-Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing  
3-Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written composition

**Arts and Communication**4- Understands ways in which the human experience is transmitted and reflected in the arts and communication

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* [**What Is Your Most Memorable Writing Assignment?**](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/01/23/what-is-your-most-memorable-writing-assignment/)
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**7 Comments**

1. 1. November 22, 2009 5:26 pm[Link](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/16/cant-complain-writing-about-pet-peeves/#comment-2831)

I love it~I was just looking for some fresh ideas for persuasive writing. I’ll take a cue from you!

*— Heather H.*

1. 2. January 3, 2010 5:06 pm[Link](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/16/cant-complain-writing-about-pet-peeves/#comment-7515)

Wonderful! Sometimes I get so bogged down with lesson plans, grading, and keeping my head above water that I lose sight of experiential ways to teach students practical and formal writing.

*— Brittany*

1. 3. February 3, 2010 5:08 pm[Link](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/16/cant-complain-writing-about-pet-peeves/#comment-12433)

Unfortunately I find this new website confusing. How can I access the website for lessons plans by narrowing my search using key terms and clicking the subject. It seems that with this new website i would have to go through hundreds of lesson plans before i find what im looking for.

*— natalie*

1. 4. October 6, 2010 10:12 am[Link](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/16/cant-complain-writing-about-pet-peeves/#comment-75963)

My biggest pet-peeve is when People chew with their mouth full. The scene of meshed up food being tossed around in a person’s mouth is not pleasant. The sound of the food being crunched up to be digested is annoying with the smack of the mouth and the clatter of the teeth. Both of these combined makes it even worse,and results in me becoming aggravated with the disgusting person. People should take the time to view their surroundings and realized that they must be aware of others surroundings and that they should shut their lips when there is food inside their mouths.

*— Sequoia L., period 7*

1. 5. September 1, 2011 12:14 pm[Link](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/16/cant-complain-writing-about-pet-peeves/#comment-245711)

Public Cracking Knuckles Screaming Annoying Behavior

Public “Knuckle Cracking” brings the hair on the back of my neck stand up. It triggers the same reaction as running ones finger nails over a caulk board to me. It’s either a nervous habit some people develop when they are younger, with out concern to the destructive behaver it has on their joints years later. This annoying sound people create each time they do it, with out concern or not realizing the effect it may have on the surrounding people . A little public curtsy would be appreciated, grow your awareness of your behavior and make corrective changes before permanent damage is done.

*— Scott B*

1. 6. February 3, 2012 8:34 am[Link](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/16/cant-complain-writing-about-pet-peeves/#comment-450183)

One of my pet peeves is when you are eating and can hear a person chewing from across the table, can they not hear themselves????? Another one would be when people talk on the phone during movies, ugh that ticks me off and i just want to go and break their phone!!!!!

*— Tony H*

1. 7. February 7, 2012 3:17 pm[Link](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/16/cant-complain-writing-about-pet-peeves/#comment-456359)

boring but gave me a lot of information.

*— zukilla j.*

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[**Summer Reading**](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/04/27/our-third-annual-summer-reading-contest/)

Our summer reading contest will run from June 15 – Aug. 17 this year, and any student 13-25 can participate any week for a chance to be published. Spread the word!

* [Contest »](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/04/27/our-third-annual-summer-reading-contest/)

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What can failure teach? Find famous examples of “failure” in sports, the arts, business and more, plus essential questions and activity ideas.

* [Lesson »](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/07/sowing-failure-reaping-success-what-failure-can-teach/)
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**Comments of the Moment**

[“ I think that parents should add filters to their internet, but should also explain to their kids that pornography is nothing other than people being paid to have sex. However, I think that suggesting that a child who is six or seven will, while surfing the internet, accidently see a pornography site and be inclined to click the link, is farfetched. ”](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=2#comment-575165)

[*— Danielle B.*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=2#comment-575165)[*How Should Parents Address Internet Pornography?*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/)

[“ Pornography can desensitize people to life activities that should happen later in life.”](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=2#comment-575169)

[*— lucas p*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=2#comment-575169)[*How Should Parents Address Internet Pornography?*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/)

[“ My parents have addressed it by giving me a long talk. I mean I haven't seen it, but they just want me to be prepared for if it does ever happen. My parents and I are pretty comfortable about talking about anything. ”](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=2#comment-575176)

[*— Tyler U*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=2#comment-575176)[*How Should Parents Address Internet Pornography?*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/)

[“ I think that parents should be watching their kids, and not just setting them in front of a device and letting them play. Childhood memories should be filed with smiles, walks to the park, and laughter – not “Dora the Explorer” and other shows...Our schools need to become safer, our homes less viral, and our lives happier. ”](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=2#comment-575164)

[*— Haley Amore Sharon F.*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=2#comment-575164)[*How Should Parents Address Internet Pornography?*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/)

[“ I think it is a fun past time. It is not as bad as killing a real person because the "person" is already dead. Also it is good prep if a zombie apocalypse happens one day. In that case, I am prepared.”](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/10/when-should-you-feel-guilty-for-killing-zombies/?apage=2#comment-575097)

[*— Mike*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/10/when-should-you-feel-guilty-for-killing-zombies/?apage=2#comment-575097)[*When Should You Feel Guilty for Killing Zombies?*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/10/when-should-you-feel-guilty-for-killing-zombies/)

[“ My parents have not addressed this issue and I feel that people are overreacting. While there may be inappropriate images online, that is always going to be the case and there is really nothing you can do about it except talk to your children about what they can potentially find or see online by accident. Personally, I have been using technology since an early age and I have never "stumbled" upon pornography, however I don't know how I would react. As a result, I believe that if your son or daughter is intentionally looking up inappropriate things, the parents have failed and clearly given birth to a creep.”](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=1#comment-575102)

[*— Cece*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=1#comment-575102)[*How Should Parents Address Internet Pornography?*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/)

[“ I believe pornography does not show a kid what sex is. Sex is meant to be something that two people who love each other experience together. Pornography is just people having sex for money. I believe parents should talk to their kids about sex and about how pornography is not making love it is just a job for money. ”](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=1#comment-575024)

[*— alec d*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=1#comment-575024)[*How Should Parents Address Internet Pornography?*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/)

[“ Talking with your parents is complete awkward and I hated it but it is necessary. ”](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=1#comment-575029)

[*— Josh.H*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=1#comment-575029)[*How Should Parents Address Internet Pornography?*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/)

[“ I think parents should restrict the amount on online time to where their kid(s) don't have the time to look up porn. If in the case of accidentally viewing it through a "My Little Pony" video then there really isn't anything to do other than completely take away online but that shows the kid that you don't trust them. My parents trust me so I don't have a problem with it. I stay away from links that aren't trusted. Mainly when I go online it's to look up sheet music or go on facebook. I'm not really comfortable about talking about anything related to the subject but honestly, what teenager is? ”](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=1#comment-575023)

[*— Tristan M*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=1#comment-575023)[*How Should Parents Address Internet Pornography?*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/)

[“ Honestly the least of parents concerns these days should be porn. Welcome to the internet, where you get virus links, people saying awful stuff and black market sites. There is so much more in this world that should be a concern to parents then just porn. Everything on the internet is something to worry about, you can spend that time talking about it talking more about what happened between a fight or bullying incident. Which could hurt someone far worse then porn.”](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=1#comment-575016)

[*— sam s.*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=1#comment-575016)[*How Should Parents Address Internet Pornography?*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/)

[“ Why are we so concerned about porn? What about online racism, bullying, hate, horror films, drugs. As far as I know, there is not a hospital on the planet which has admitted someone for viewing porn, yet their are significant numbers of youngsters in hospital due to drugs, alcohol, physical bullying, etc.”](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=1#comment-574955)

[*— Tom*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/?apage=1#comment-574955)[*How Should Parents Address Internet Pornography?*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/have-your-parents-talked-to-you-about-internet-pornography/)

[“ In America it is normal to see other cutlers mixed with our own. That the fast food taco was taken from its original owners is normal not ethical but not uncommon. So many of the franchised we know have and have been popularized by steeling ideas and technology. Microsoft stole the graphic interface from mac; who stole it from HP. The appropriating of ideas and technology is all over in the world. Look at the internet there are hundreds of sites dedicated to getting software and games that are normally expensive for free.”](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/03/do-you-prefer-your-tacos-authentic-or-appropriated/?apage=6#comment-574369)

[*— Caelen LKL*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/03/do-you-prefer-your-tacos-authentic-or-appropriated/?apage=6#comment-574369)[*Do You Prefer Your Tacos 'Authentic' or 'Appropriated'?*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/03/do-you-prefer-your-tacos-authentic-or-appropriated/)

[“ It's hard for me to talk about my last conversation. Maybe a little bit of my back story will help I was born in West Philadelphia and also raised there. I spent most of my days on the playground. Chilin and relaxing, acting all cool. Shooting some hoops right outside the school. And then one day a couple of guys who were up to no good, started making trouble in my living area. I got in one little fight and my mom got scared and said you're movin' with your auntie and uncle in Bel-Air...I whistled for a cab and when it came near The license plate said "Fresh", and had dice in the mirror If anything I could say that this cab was rare But I thought nah forget it, yo home to Bel-Air! I pulled up to the house about 7 or 8, and I yelled to the cabbie, "Yo Holmes, smell ya later!" Looked at my kingdom I was finally there. To sit on my throne as the Prince of Bel-Air So that's my story. My last conversation was with my mom before she sent me away, now I live with my aunt and uncle and my cousin Carlton.”](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/04/23/when-did-you-last-have-a-great-conversatio/?apage=8#comment-574393)

[*— Dave (hobart)*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/04/23/when-did-you-last-have-a-great-conversatio/?apage=8#comment-574393)[*When Did You Last Have a Great Conversation?*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/04/23/when-did-you-last-have-a-great-conversatio/)

[“ Get with the times. Who cares if the world is starting to text rather than talk in person? If the majority of kids are doing it now then the majority will be doing it when they are older. Making it normal. Quit fighting innovation and embrace it.”](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/04/23/when-did-you-last-have-a-great-conversatio/?apage=8#comment-574386)

[*— Sean*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/04/23/when-did-you-last-have-a-great-conversatio/?apage=8#comment-574386)[*When Did You Last Have a Great Conversation?*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/04/23/when-did-you-last-have-a-great-conversatio/)

[“ tacos are tacos. they're all different just like humans.”](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/03/do-you-prefer-your-tacos-authentic-or-appropriated/?apage=5#comment-574344)

[*— Calvin V*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/03/do-you-prefer-your-tacos-authentic-or-appropriated/?apage=5#comment-574344)[*Do You Prefer Your Tacos 'Authentic' or 'Appropriated'?*](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/03/do-you-prefer-your-tacos-authentic-or-appropriated/)

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[**Test Yourself | English, May 11, 2012**](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/test-yourself-english-may-11-2012/)

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**Other Education Resources at The Times**

* [Education Life](http://www.nytimes.com/indexes/2009/07/25/education/edlife/index.html)
* [Make an Education Donation](http://www.nytstore.com/ProdDetail.aspx?prodId=30447)
* [SchoolBook](http://www.nytimes.com/schoolbook/)
* [The Choice Blog](http://thechoice.blogs.nytimes.com/)
* [The Knowledge Network](http://www.nytimesknownow.com/)
* [The New York Times College Scholarship Program](http://www.nytco.com/social_responsibility/college_scholarship_program.html)
* [The New York Times in Education (NIE)](http://nytmarketing.whsites.net/inschool/)
* [The New York Times Upfront](http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/upfront/index.asp)
* [Times Education section](http://www.nytimes.com/pages/education/index.html)
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* [Advertise](http://www.nytimes.whsites.net/mediakit/)

**Movie Trailers As Persuasive Texts**by Frank Baker copyright 2008  
  
**Introduction:** Students love to watch film and they also love to go to the movies. So they are already familiar with trailers whose purpose is to promote/market upcoming releases. Today, teachers and students can locate trailers via the web, so they are more accessible than ever. This page is a resource for teachers who wish to consider using trailers to teach students about persuasive texts and techniques.  
  
**Persuasion:** Students should already know something about persuasive writing and persuasive arguments. (e.g. what techniques do writers use to convince us of something?) Students might also have previously studied persuasion via advertising (print and non-print) or via propaganda. It would be a good idea to review elements of persuasion before diving into this lesson.  
  
**The Language of Film**: Are your students aware that film is a text that has a language all its own? Yes, elements of film need to be understood by students, after which they will become "active" rather "passive viewers" of film. For example, certain camera angles will be used for certain purposes; specific music will convey an emotion; lighting can be manipulated for effect. Everything is created for a reason and has meaning. To help you and your students get started, here is a [good web site](http://inpoint.cinematheque.bc.ca/LanguageofFilm.htm) which has complete explanations of the languages of film. (Need more background?Log onto the Media Literacy Clearinghouse's [Motion Picture website](http://www.frankwbaker.com/motion_pictures.htm))  
  
**Why study film? "**Anyone who has ever watched a movie with a classroom full of teenagers knows that students are comfortable with film and understand its power. By high school, they have watched thousands of movies and television shows and unconsciously understand the basic tools and conventions of the medium. Although they may still treat it chiefly as passive entertainment, they can often be sophisticated interpreters of the interplay of sound and image. They know -- often without knowing they know -- that the close-up on an actor's face signifies something different emotionally from a long shot of an actor across a distance. They know that certain kinds of music indicate that a dramatic event is about to happen, and they know that 'fuzzy' camerawork can signal a dream sequence or flashback in which we are inside a particular character's mind or point of view." ([Source](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/learningresources/fic_intro.html))  
  
**Getting Started:**  
Ask students to brainstorm answers to these questions:   
what are the "elements" of most film trailers?   
who is the audience for the trailer? How do you know?  
what is the audience told or shown? not told or shown? why?  
what is the primary purpose of the trailer?  
who creates/edits/produces trailers?  
how are trailers distributed/disseminated?  
what specific techniques are used in trailers?  
what is the length of most trailers?  
does watching a trailer make you desire more information?  
  
[**Introducing Film Trailers**](http://www.teachit.co.uk/attachments/trailer1.pdf): worksheet to download and have students complete  
  
**Getting Started:** Have students define and understand the following terms/phrases/ideas:  
**Genre**   
**Narrative  
Location  
Characters  
Voice Over  
Theme  
Mood  
Pacing**  
**On-screen graphics**   
**Editing & post production (includes Special Effects)  
Music and other sound effects  
  
  
Download:** [**Student Worksheet for Analyzing Film Trailers as Persuasive Texts**](http://www.frankwbaker.com/worksheet_for_analyzing_film_trailers.htm)

**Worksheet for Analyzing Film Trailers as Persuasive Texts  
copyright 2008, Frank W. Baker**Instructions: choose a variety of movie trailers to use in the lesson. After students have become familiar with the language of filmand the persuasive techniques, they should view a trailer, consider the elements and then complete this worksheet.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Genre | Narrative | Location | Characters | Voice Over | Theme(s) | Pacing | On- Screen Graphics | Editing (post production) & special effects | Music (and other sounds) |
| Trailer  #1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Trailer #2 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Trailer #3 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Genre** (is the film animated, drama, documentary, comedy, sci-fi, adolescent, horror, etc.)  
**Narrative** (how is the story told?) **Location** (how does the trailer reveal location? what clues tell you so?) **Characters** (describe the people portrayed in the trailer based on the info in the trailer) **Voice Over** (who is the narrator? )  
**Theme** (identify at least one theme based on the trailer)  
**Pacing** (how is the trailer paced: fast, medium, slow? what impact might pacing have?)  
**On-screen graphics** (what kind of info is revealed--be specific)  
**Editing & post production** (can include special effects) **Music and other sound effects** (what role do they play?)  
  
Questions to consider:  
1. how does the trailer begin and end? Was it effectively edited?

2. what film studio is releasing the trailer? What might you know about them and their previously released films?  
3. why is this trailer being played before the specific film you are about to view?  
4. who creates trailers?  
5. do trailers always tell you everything you need to know about the film? (if not, where can you get more information?)

**Background  
What is a movie trailer?** Trailers or previews are film advertisements for films that will be exhibited in the future at a cinema, on whose screen they are shown. The term "trailer" comes from their having originally been shown at the end of a film programme. That practice did not last long, because patrons tended to leave the theater after the films ended, but the name has stuck. Trailers are now shown before the film (or the A movie in a double feature program) begins. (Source: [wikipedia)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trailer_(movie)) also called **teaser trailer:** A short trailer which does not give very much at all away about a film. It is designed to arouse curiosity and may appear a long time prior to the release of a movie (source: [mediaknowitall](http://www.mediaknowall.com/gcse/Blockbuster/marketingglossary.html))  
  
**More about trailers**:  
Trailers consist of a series of selected shots from the film being advertised. Since the purpose of the trailer is to attract an audience to the film, these excerpts are usually drawn from the most exciting, funny, or otherwise noteworthy parts of the film but in abbreviated form and without producing spoilers. For this purpose the scenes are not necessarily in the order in which they appear in the film. A trailer has to achieve that in less than two and a half minutes, the maximum length allowed by theaters. Each studio or distributor is allowed to exceed this time limit once a year, if they feel it is necessary for a particular film. (Source: [wikipedia)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trailer_(movie))  
  
**Where to locate movie trailers on-line:**[AOL](http://movies.aol.com/trailers/main?icid=AOLDesktopToolbar:Movies:Story)  
[Cinematrailers.net](http://www.cinematrailers.net)[Get-Trailers.com](http://get-trailers.com)   
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[Internet Movie Database Trailer Gallery](http://www.imdb.com/Sections/Trailers/)   
[iTunes movie trailers](http://www.apple.com/trailers/)  
[Movie-List - New and Classic Movie Trailers](http://www.movie-list.com/)   
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[SabuCat Movie Trailers](http://www.archive.org/details/sabucat_trailers) (archive.org)   
[TrailerStats](http://www.trailerstats.com)  
  
**Trailers on TV:** HD Net's *Trailerama; The Ultimate Trailer Show* (showtimes vary)  
  
**NCTE Resources Involving Film Trailers:**At The Movies: Extending Literacy Learning With Movies Trailers (Classroom Notes, April '09)Chapter: Turning Texts Into Movie Trailers (from [Lesson Plans for Creating Media Rich Classrooms](http://www.ncte.org/pubs/books/new/128468.htm))  
Book: [Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom](http://www.ncte.org/store/books/media/106296.htm?source=gs)  
Book: [Great Films and How to Teach Them](http://www.ncte.org/store/books/117911.htm?source=gs) / [Study Guides for 12 Great Films CD-ROM](http://www.ncte.org/store/books/119572.htm?source=gs)  
  
**Recommended text/readings:**[How Movie Ratings and Trailers Mislead You](http://blog.moviefone.com/2011/03/03/misleading-ratings-and-trailers/)[Coming Soon: A Technological History of the Film Trailer](http://www.mcfarlandpub.com/book-2.php?id=978-0-7864-4432-8) Using Technology to Promote Reading: Book Trailers (LibrarySparks,May/June '09)[What happens when movie trailers include stuff NOT in the movie?](http://pogue.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/01/10/movie-trailers-the-final-cut/)  
[Coming Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers](http://www.utexas.edu/utpress/books/kercom.html)  
[How to Create A Compelling Film Trailer](http://www.microfilmmaker.com/tipstrick/Issue14/Edit_Trl.html)  
[History of Trailers](http://www.cbc.ca/ageofpersuasion/episode/season-5/2011/02/26/season-five-aop-goes-to-the-movies-1/) (CBC, Age Of Persuasion)  
[Trailers: How a small time slot adds up to big industry headache](http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/movies/2002181046_trailers16.html)  
  
**Recommended external links:**[Recut trailers](http://lessonbucket.com/year-ten/movie-trailers)  
YouTube: [Recutting a Movie Trailer](http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=3DCEF3CC55687A3D) (instructions)[Create Your Own 'Sweeny Todd' Trailer](http://www.sweeneytoddmovie.com/mashup/)  
[Exploring Film Trailers](http://www.filmeducation.org.uk/teachingtrailers/docs/Session_plans.pdf)  
Film Street (UK): [How to make a trailer](http://www.filmstreet.co.uk/articleview.aspa?PageId=682&nodeid=233)  
Film Trailers: [Genre & Narrative Structure](http://www.filmeducation.org./staffroom/film_in_the_classroom/film_trailers/genre_narrative_structure.php); [Trailer Techniques](http://www.filmeducation.org./staffroom/film_in_the_classroom/film_trailers/trailer_techniques.php); [In The Classroom](http://www.filmeducation.org./staffroom/film_in_the_classroom/film_trailers/in_the_classroom.php)  
[How to analyze a film trailer](http://movieken.com/articles/item/how-to-analyze-a-film-trailer.html)  
[Making Movie Trailers](http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/curriculumICT/ideas_bank/ib07.htm)  
[Movie Trailers](http://www.thedirectorscut.ca/images/uploads/MOVIE_TRAILERS_ONTARIO.pdf) (The Director's Cut)  
[Teach It: Trailers](http://www.teachit.co.uk/index.asp?CurrMenu=271)  
[Teaching Trailers](http://www.filmeducation.org/teachingtrailers/) 2012  
[Teaching Trailers](http://web.archive.org/web/20061111133757/http:/www.filmeducation.org/secondary/TTV/TouchingTheVoid.pdf)  
[Teaching Trailers Plus](http://www.filmanchor.com/filmmaking/Teaching%20Trailers%20Plus.pdf)  
[Using Film Previews to Practice Constructing Questions in English](http://esl-programs-lessons.suite101.com/article.cfm/movie_trailer_esl_video_lesson)  
[Using Movie Trailers in an ESL CALL Class](http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Gebhardt-MovieTrailers.html)   
[Visual Rhetoric/Mediums and Manifestations of Visual Rhetoric](http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Visual_Rhetoric/Mediums_and_Manifestations_of_Visual_Rhetoric)  
[Making Book Trailers with Photo Story 3](http://www.techlearning.com/story/showArticle.php?articleID=196604857)   
[Blog advice: Book video trailers](http://robinmizell.wordpress.com/2007/10/07/part-8-book-video-trailers/)

**Selling Rock ‘N Roll to the PTA**

You will be arranged in groups of four. Each group is to consider itself a "company" that has excess items to sell. Each group will pick an item to "market" and an audience around which the advertising must center.

In your groups, you must discuss the selling qualities of the item and the uses that the item would have for the target group. Make a list of these uses.

Next, you will compose a letter designed to persuade the target group to buy the item. The letter should be typed.

Your group will also prepare an ad, an appropriate slogan and a brochure of the features of the item you are to marker. Plan on "showing off" your end results to the class. **Remember to always consider your audience.** Be funny, be creative – I can’t wait to see the results!! Have fun!!

We will follow the tentative schedule:

Day One: Introduction/orientation; work in groups to discuss the selling qualities of the item - - the list is due at the end of the hour.

Day Two: In groups, compose your letter—rough draft due at the end of the hour.

Day Three: Finalize your letter; work on your ad; prepare a slogan.

Day Four: Work on brochure.

Day Five: Finalize brochure if necessary and present marketing items to the class.

**Items**

Purple and green striped denim overalls

Peppermint patties

Hot rollers

Eyeglass frames (with no lenses)

Empty coke aluminum cans

**Groups**

Harley Davidson Motorcycle Club

Parolees from the Ohio minimum security prison system

Members of Early Morning Bird Watchers of Greater Utah

Chamber of Commerce of Riptide, Michigan

The executive committee members of the Retired Coaches of America